

Terminology and Language for use in ParaCheer Coaching

ParaCheer International CIO promotes the use of inclusive language as part of our objectives to support the inclusion of all athletes regardless of impairment, gender, sexuality, ethnicity or other relevant protected characteristic.

As a coach, you may already be aware that some athletes on your team may have had a negative experience with certain words and terms being used in a derogatory way or being inaccurate descriptions of their daily lives. Though you or other athletes have no intention to upset any one, words that are in common use may be much more triggering to those with certain types of disability, so we have created a terminology sheet to help you avoid any unnecessary upset. We have found that an open mind, a clear intention to adapt, and a willingness to be corrected, if you do use a term that someone finds upsetting, are the best ways to do this, but following the suggestions below can really help prevent any issues.

Please note these terms and words are based on UK best practice and may differ in other countries including those with English as their main language such as America, Canada and Australia. Not everyone will agree on everything but there is general agreement on some basic guidelines.

Government guidelines

The UK government have set out a list of guidelines that we at ParaCheer International agree are appropriate terminology along with words to avoid. Below is what they have to say about Inclusive language. Their original guidelines can be found by following the link in our sources section at the end of this document.

Collective terms and labels

The word 'disabled' is a description not a group of people. You can use 'disabled people' rather than 'the disabled' as the collective term, but for the purpose of a ParaCheer team we feel that there is little need to separate the disabled athletes from your non-disabled athletes in your group speak, so "my team" is even better.

Many deaf people whose first language is BSL consider themselves part of 'the deaf community' – they may describe themselves as 'Deaf', with a capital D, to emphasise their deaf identity.

We would advise avoiding medical labels. They say little about people as individuals and tend to reinforce stereotypes of disabled people as 'patients' or unwell. This is part of what is known as 'the medical model of disability' and unhelpful in cheerleading.

Positive not negative

There is a lot of discussion in certain countries about something called “people first language” where you refer to a “person with a disability” rather than a “disabled person” however in the UK this is felt by many to put the responsibility of a disability onto the disabled person instead of with society as a whole. This isn’t something supported by the Social model of disability. More information on the different models of disability can be found on our website.

We tend to avoid phrases like ‘suffers from’ which suggest discomfort, constant pain and a sense of hopelessness. If you must refer to a persons’ specific impairment, it would be advised to say they ‘have’ the impairment rather than that they ‘are’ the impairment.

Wheelchair users may also not view themselves as ‘confined to’ a wheelchair or ‘wheelchair bound’. Therefore try thinking of it as a mobility aid instead. E.g ‘the athlete uses a wheelchair’ not ‘the wheelchair athlete’.

Everyday phrases

Most disabled people are comfortable with the words used to describe daily living. People who use wheelchairs ‘go for walks’ and people with visual impairments may be very pleased, or not, ‘to see you’. An impairment, may just mean that some things are done in a different way.

Common phrases that may associate impairments with negative things should be avoided, for example ‘deaf to our pleas’, ‘blind drunk’, ‘he/she is lame’.

Top tips on behaviour

- Don’t be afraid to make mistakes
- Use a normal tone of voice, don’t patronise or talk down
- No need to be too precious or too politically correct, being super-sensitive to the right and wrong language and depictions will stop you doing anything
- Never attempt to speak or finish a sentence for the person you are talking to
- Address disabled people in the same way as you talk to everyone else
- Speak directly to a disabled person, even if they have an interpreter or companion with them

Words to use and avoid

We recommend avoiding passive, victim words and instead suggest you use language that respects your disabled athletes as active individuals with control over their own lives.

Avoid ✘	Use ✔
(the) handicapped, (the) disabled	disabled (people) (athletes)
afflicted by, suffers from, victim of	has [name of condition or impairment]
confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound	wheelchair user
mentally handicapped, mentally defective, retarded, subnormal	with a learning disability (singular) with learning disabilities (plural)
cripple, invalid	disabled person
spastic	person with cerebral palsy
able-bodied	non-disabled
mental patient, insane, mad	person with a mental health condition
deaf and dumb; deaf mute	deaf, user of British Sign Language (BSL), person with a hearing impairment
the blind	people with visual impairments; blind people; blind and partially sighted people
an epileptic, diabetic, depressive, and so on	person with epilepsy, diabetes, depression or someone who has epilepsy, diabetes, depression
dwarf; midget	someone with restricted growth or short stature
fits, spells, attacks	Seizures

A note on the term “able-bodied”

Many people consider the term able-bodied to signify those without disabilities. It is now however considered to be an inappropriate and rather derogatory term considering it's wider connotations as noted in the governments advice above. Considering “disabled” is a catch all term, there is little need to have a second specific term for those without disabilities thus referring to them as “non-disabled” or “without disabilities” is enough. Additionally, and especially taking into account the likely capabilities of the athletes you have on your teams, the term able-bodied being used exclusively for those without disabilities is grammatically incorrect and suggests that the disabled athletes aren't capable independent people. Your athletes both disabled and non-disabled will likely be able to lift other people, turn tumblers and dance like super stars. They are likely way more ‘able of body’ than a large portion of the non-disabled non athletic national population regardless of whether they have to make adaptations due to their impairment.

Origin of the word “ParaCheer”

The term ParaCheer was coined by Karl Olsen in 2012 when describing a partner stunt duo who had a wheelchair using base (our founder Rick Rodgers to be exact). Many people think it has its roots in the concept of wheelchair use and disability because of the term Paralysis but in fact it has a different basis. The term Para as a prefix has many meanings, including: **alongside of**, beside, near, **resembling**, beyond, and apart from. As with the Paralympics (alongside the Olympics) the prefix “para” in the word ParaCheer means alongside of and resembling cheer. It's distinct in it's own right having a slightly different rule set and focus but it is very much part of cheer and part of the whole. The word is nothing to do with the concept of paralysis or disability in any specific terms. We wanted to clear that up as it has left a few confused in the past.

Additional Glossary information

- *Ability* – The quality of being capable of doing something
- *Ableism* – Discrimination and exclusion that oppresses people who may have mental, emotional, physical, sensory and intellectual disabilities.
- *Adaptations* – Changes to a technique or method to work within someone's capabilities and take into account their impairment.
- *Base Support* – An athlete, usually non-disabled, who works to assist and support a disabled athlete as part of their adaptations.
- *Classification* – the act or process of dividing things into groups according to their type. For ParaCheer athletes their classification is the level to which their impairment effects their ability to participate in cheerleading activities in a typical fashion.

- *Disabled* – We consider a person disabled if they have a substantial and long term impairment, which affects their day-to-day functions and that has, or is expected to, last longer than 9 months.
- *Disability* – A social construct that identifies any restriction or lack of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered “typical” for a human being given environments that are constructed for and by the dominant or “typical” person.
- *Discrimination* – Inequitable actions carried out by members of a dominant group or its representatives against members of a marginalized or minoritised group.
- *Impairment* – The factor which causes a persons status as a disabled person. An impairment can be any health condition, illness, injury or event of birth or genetics which means the person cannot carry out their day-to-day activities in what is generally considered a typical fashion.
Invisible disabilities – An impairment that though substantial, isn't obvious or doesn't affect the person’s physical appearance. Many disabilities are not visible at first glance. Though the person may not look injured or different to others, there may still be factors in that person’s life, which affect their day-to-day functioning.
- *Inclusion* – The idea that everyone should be able to take part in the same activities and use the same facilities.
- *Integrated* – Disabled and non-disabled people working together as one / combined to form a single team.
- *Microaggressions* – Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults about one’s marginalized identity/identities.

Sources

Government Guidelines

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-communication/inclusive-language-words-to-use-and-avoid-when-writing-about-disability>

LGBTQIA Resource center

<http://lgbtqia.ucdavis.edu/educated/glossary.html>